

Readership Survey Findings – Part 2

By the Editor

Readers may be excused for forgetting that a readers survey was carried out by this Journal in 1996, the principal findings of which were published (as Part 1) in 1997 *THJ* 1997, pages 92-94. A second article on this survey was planned for 1998, but for personal reasons outside the editor's control it proved impossible to complete on time. An attempt to repair this omission is made below.

First, to recap briefly, more than 120 readers (including some with late replies), or almost 25% of our then membership, responded. The first article on the survey dealt with readers' age-groups and occupations and the extent of readership. Popular periods were the 19th and 18th centuries (in that order); less popular was the post-1925 period. More archaeology and genealogy was demanded; so were more illustrative aids.

The replies containing readers' suggestions for improving the Journal covered a wide variety of topics, numbering over 40. Amongst the more predictable areas seeking coverage were the Reformation and Cromwellian periods, 1798 and the Penal Laws. (It is fair to point out that the '98 Rising, which officially did not occur in Tipperary, has been covered by three academic contributors.) Landlords and the Plantations produced several supporters also.

Amongst surprising demands were an annual index (something quite impracticable for a Journal like this) and translations of articles in Irish, something that would take up space needed for material in English. Other topics called for, but never so far dealt with, include the Fr Nicholas Sheehy episode, the Blueshirt movement in Tipperary, the county's association with the Spanish Civil War and World War I, and material on that sadly neglected source of local history, the graveyards of the county, now being restored in many places.

Only one reader (each) suggested the following subjects – Tipperary people abroad, placenames, old churches, the Fenian movement. Almost unbelievably, coverage of sports or athletics was called for by only two readers. Even more surprising is that two of the four objects of the Society – geography and folklore – were asked for by only three and four readers, respectively. One reader wanted material on 17th century Protestant immigration; three asked for the ordinary humble citizen to get more space, while yet another expressed a cryptic desire for "less shiny paper"!

By way of general response, the editor wishes to put some basic facts to those who participated in this survey. First, without in any way taking from the invaluable work done by a tiny handful in addition to the editor – foremost among them the Society's treasurer, without whom this Journal would not survive – it needs to be stressed that this Journal is 95% the work of one person, now fast approaching his mid-70s.

Secondly, the Journal depends, perhaps to the extent of 90% of material, on contributions volunteered. For over a decade commissioning of articles has been a non-starter. However, readers are assured that, consistent with achieving the semi-academic standard aimed at from the start, if or when an article on any of the 40 or so topics requested by the survey is submitted, it will be accepted for publication in the next issue after submission, assuming the space for it is still available.

However, with a journal confined to one county there are, readers may realise on reflection,

certain built-in limitations. Experts on periods before the 19th century are scarce on the ground. Apart from the few already published, the standard of material in the Irish language has proved uniformly abysmal for 12 years. Geographers, folklorists and genealogists have all shunned this Journal, to such an extent that it is doubtful if these disciplines are worth retaining amongst the Journal's remit. Illustrative material fit to reproduce is extremely expensive; readers will have observed that it has taken 12 years to carry a colour photograph, and then only with a generous subsidy from South Tipperary County Council obtained through the good offices of the curator of the S.R. Co. Museum, Pat Holland and the generosity of another contributor.

To readers calling for more book reviews the news is bad. For several reasons – few offers (often despite editorial requests) of local books, failure of reviewers (mostly academics) to keep to deadlines, and other reasons one is inhibited by the defamation laws from specifying here – the Books Section has had to be re-cast to contain only a small number of genuine major Tipperary books, local books being allotted only a short paragraph each.

To the couple of demands for literature and/or poetry the editor must point to the Journal's title. It is solely a history journal, within the wide meaning of history given by the Society's rules. For expressing their views so frankly and in confidence the editor is grateful to the 120-plus readers who answered his questionnaire, whose views he will continue to take account of.

Finally, for easy reference the tabulated summary published in Part 1 (in THJ 1997) is reproduced below.

Summary of Main Queries

Question	Yes	No	Neutral
Maximum 20 pages?	46%	12.5%	19%
Less space to 1900-23?	12.5%	30%	16%
More on 1925+?	22%	19%	35%
Less space to 19th century?	5%	52.5%	18%
More to pre-19th century?	45.5%	17.5%	12.5%
More genealogy?	31%	12.5%	26%
More archaeology?	19%	10%	30%